

# THE JEWS OF PRIME TIME

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## INTRODUCTION

Given that Jews numerically prevail in some of our cultural institutions, and that in others they are represented in numbers and positions that automatically give them major influence, and given further that Jews have a Jewish sensibility, it follows that Jewish sensibility is likely to dominate some of our cultural institutions. It does.

Ernest van den Haag<sup>1</sup>

It makes no sense at all to try to deny the reality of Jewish power and prominence in popular culture...Any Martian monitoring American television...would view *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, *The Nanny*, *Northern Exposure*, *Mad about You*, and other shows and be surprised to learn that fewer than 1 in 40 Americans is Jewish...

Michael Medved<sup>2</sup>

The way Steven Spielberg sees the world has become the way the world is communicated back to us every day.

Stephen Schiff<sup>3</sup>

## AMID THE TURBULENCE OF THE SIXTIES

In the wake of the turbulent sixties, one could do worse than identify a change in the prime-time television lineup to mark the beginning of the end of the dominance of people of European heritage in the United States. For in the early 1970s, the “hayseed” shows about the heartland and the American Majority vanished from the three major networks’ evening offerings and were replaced by decidedly more ethnic fare. In a few short years, essentially all-white shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Andy Griffith Show*/*Mayberry R.F.D.*, *Green Acres*, and *Petticoat Junction* gave way to “hip, urban” shows that “pushed the socially engaged agenda into the ethno-racial arena.” In place of Andy Griffith and Don Knotts, viewers were now watching characters from “ethnicoms” in shows like *Sanford and Son*, *The Jeffersons*, and *Chico and the Man*.<sup>4</sup> Alongside these shows came socially conscious sitcoms often critical

of mainstream values, led by Norman Lear's *All in the Family*. What did all this mean for representation of life in modern America, and where has it led in the ensuing thirty-five years?

Perhaps Wilmot Robertson was right when he wrote about the dispossession of majority white Christians in modern America. The present essay focuses on one aspect of that dispossession: the role of prime-time television, which in the years 1960–2000 was possibly the most powerful medium in existence for delivering scripted cultural messages to the American masses.

To understand the changes that have been made on the small screen, it is necessary to focus on who the people are that have been in a position to make those changes and who have, in fact, been making them. We find that the primary producers of this form of anti-majority cultural representation are essentially the same group as that producing media images more generally. That the members of this group are not themselves drawn from the majority has had a critical impact on the final products Americans see on TV.

Readers may suspect that the group in question is composed largely of immigrant Eastern European Jews and their descendants, an argument that has been made by TOQ contributor Kevin MacDonald. In the paperback preface to *The Culture of Critique*, MacDonald describes the Hollywood aspects of a wider culture struggle between Jews and Gentiles. The kings of Hollywood branched out easily from their first visual mass medium into the electronic media of radio, and then, as technology advanced, into television. The same themes and conflicts evident in a hundred years of Hollywood film can therefore be found in TV offerings as well. For a few crucial reasons, though, television was late in explicitly addressing them.

We are fortunate to have not only extensive studies of “the Jewish invention of Hollywood”<sup>5</sup> but insightful scholarship into the role of Jews in the creation of television fare as well. For instance, we have Jonathan and Judith Pearl's *The Chosen Image: Television's Portrayal of Jewish Themes and Characters* (1999); Vincent Brook's *Something Ain't Kosher Here: The Rise of the “Jewish” Sitcom* (2003); David Zurawik's *The Jews of Prime Time* (2003); and Paul Buhle's *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture* (2004). These books delineate and discuss the scores of Jewish programs and characters featured on American TV in the last three decades, with names familiar to even the most casual TV viewer: *Mad About You*, *Northern Exposure*, *The Nanny*, *Friends*, *Brooklyn Bridge*, *Dharma and Greg*, *The Larry Sanders Show*, and most of all, *Seinfeld*.

## I. JEWS ON TV

In their book *The Chosen Image*, the Pearls offer a fascinating look at the Jewish themes Americans have been exposed to by prime-time TV. There have been portraits of bar and bat mitzvahs, Jewish weddings, anti-Semitism, Chanukah, and, of course, the Holocaust. “Jewish matters,” the Pearls write,

"have driven story lines, shaped characters, defined issues, and made appearances on countless TV shows throughout the decades. Indeed, the presence of Jewish themes on television has been a constant throughout the history of television. From its earliest days until today, the great reflector of American life has simply recognized the active place of Jews within that life."<sup>6</sup>

In the same year that *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres* disappeared from television screens, *All in the Family* made its debut, placing before the American people a completely different representation of American character and culture. Jewish liberal Norman Lear had created Archie Bunker, who became a beloved icon for millions of television viewers. In an important sense, Archie's primary role was to usher out the older era of a white, male-dominated America, represented by people like himself, and to instruct this soon-to-be disestablished class in the manners and attitudes befitting a new, multicultural America, one in which blacks could own their own businesses and homosexuals could come out of the closet.

Most of all, this new, multicultural America was one in which Jews and all things Jewish had a new-found prominence. "By the end of his twelve years on prime-time television," the Pearls inform us, "Archie Bunker, America's best-known bigot, had come to raise a Jewish child in his home, befriend a black Jew, go into business with a Jewish partner, enroll as a member of Temple Beth Shalom, eulogize his close friend at a Jewish funeral, host a Sabbath dinner, participate in a bat mitzvah ceremony, and join a group to fight synagogue vandalism."<sup>7</sup>

Cultural historians and other astute observers have seen clearly that this shift in focus from America's majority Christian whites to a broad cast of minorities was far from inevitable, for humans themselves construct all cultural products. Although the vast majority of the important players in determining TV programming were Jews, they were at first reluctant to project themselves and their concerns too directly into what appeared on broadcast TV, at least for the first few decades of American television. This was the "too Jewish" conundrum that American Jews had earlier encountered — and conquered — for literature and film.

David Zurawik takes this as his starting point in *The Jews of Prime Time*, asking, "What is 'too Jewish' yet not Jewish enough?" Answer: "the strange history of Jewish characters on prime-time network television." The incongruence to which he refers comes from the fact that nearly all the top TV executives and producers were Jewish, yet they were ambivalent about portraying their own high status or that of Jews in other important areas of American life. To illustrate, he begins with an interview with Jewish comedian Al Franken. Zurawik's direct access to Franken and TV mogul Brandon Tartikoff provides an inside view of Jewish thinking on the "too Jewish" issue.

Tartikoff was concerned about a sketch on NBC Entertainment's highly popular *Saturday Night Live* show, in which actor Tom Hanks plays the fictional

emcee of a game show called "Jew/Not-a-Jew." Alluding to *Laverne & Shirley* costar Penny Marshall, Hanks asks, "Okay, panelists, Jew or not a Jew?" Tartikoff allowed that it was funny "but was it anti-Semitic?" After agonizing over it for a week, he gave the skit a green light, whereupon his phone rang off the hook on Sunday morning "with calls from colleagues, many of whom were Jewish." The most troubling call, said Tartikoff, came from his mother. "I cannot believe it. I'm embarrassed to call you my son. This Jew/Not-a-Jew sketch was the most anti-Semitic thing I've ever seen."

While Tartikoff may have erred in this instance, there were other times he pulled the plug because a sketch or show was "too Jewish." Why did Tartikoff and other Jewish executives so often react this way? To Franken, it was because "there's a feeling among some Jews that 'Hey, let's not get too out front in our Jewishness, because people might not like it.' ... 'Hey, let's not...draw fire. There's a lot of us in this business, let's not call attention to it, you know.'" This may well explain why so many Jewish network executives and TV programmers shaded or avoided any connection between Jewish identity and what characters said or did on so many shows. In fact, Tartikoff in 1991 nearly canceled *Seinfeld* after just one episode for being — surprise — "too Jewish."

Zurawik finds David Sarnoff and William Paley, respective founders of NBC and CBS, responsible for leading the way in Jewish self-censorship. While many other powerful Jewish executives respected this censorship, Zurawik believes that Paley set the bar when it came to avoiding "surplus Jewish visibility." He wrote, "There is no doubt that Paley is one of the primary reasons there were no Jewish characters on network television from 1955 to 1972." Given the "incredible power Paley wielded in television during those years," it is understandable that his strong desire not to see Jewish characters on television would be honored.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, Zurawik's observations go only so far, for, in addition to mid-70s shows like *Archie Bunker*, one could also find heavily Jewish-inflected shows like *Bridget Loves Bernie*, *Rhoda*, *Welcome Back Kotter*, *Barney Miller*, and *Taxi*. In any case, the taboo vanished in many respects around the same year that Tartikoff gave the okay to *Seinfeld*, after which overtly Jewish shows became the norm across the spectrum, from sitcoms to late-night shows on cable (think of Comedy Central's *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* [born Jonathan Stuart Leibowitz in 1962] or *Larry King Live* with Larry King [born Lawrence Harvey Ziegler]). Mostly, however, the Jewish shows that blossomed in the 1990s were of the *Mad about You* variety, which brings us to the issues that became the ones most featured: assimilation and intermarriage.

Both Zurawik and the Pearls devote extensive space to these issues, which in most ways mirror earlier analyses from film, when critics and scholars could mine the likes of *Marjorie Morningstar* (1958), *Funny Girl* (1968), *Goodbye Columbus* (1969), *Portnoy's Complaint* (1972), or *Annie Hall* (1977) for cultural ore. As in film, when television approached these themes, the drama centered

almost exclusively around the Jewish male courting the Gentile female, or, as critics so lovingly referred to her, the *shiksa*. Of the *shiksa*, one critic wrote:

In the 1990s, it seems that the mother of every fictional female on television is advising her daughter to find a nice Jewish boy. And the daughters are listening. From hour-long dramas, "Sisters," "Chicago Hope," and "Murder One," to 30-minute comedies, "Mad about You," "Cybill," "Partners," "Bless This House," "The Single Guy," "The Larry Sanders Show," "Friends," "Love and War," "Seinfeld," and "Murphy Brown," Jewish men are dating – and marrying – Gentile women in numbers far exceeding any other interethnic relationships currently on television.

The most likely reason for such images, the critic argues, is that Jewish men run Hollywood.<sup>9</sup> But do Jews really have that much power in television?

## II. JEWISH POWER IN TV

From its origins, Hollywood has been stamped with a Jewish identity, but nobody else was supposed to know about it. But somehow, no matter how thorough the attempt to suppress or disguise it, Jewishness is going to bob to the surface anyway.

Stephen J. Whitfield<sup>10</sup>

### *Mogul Hollywood*

Hollywood has always been a Jewish milieu. This fact has been well documented by Neal Gabler, Michael Medved, Ben Stein, and others who have chronicled Hollywood's initial and continuing Jewish makeup and sensibility, however masked it may at times be. In his 1988 book *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood*, author Neal Gabler celebrates the period of Hollywood's founding through the end of the studio and mogul era, thus buttressing the belief that "The American Dream—is a Jewish invention."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, as Medved documents:

The storefront theaters of the late teens were transformed into the movie palaces of the twenties by Jewish exhibitors. And when sound movies commandeered the industry, Hollywood was invaded by a battalion of Jewish writers, mostly from the East. The most powerful talent agencies were run by Jews. Jewish lawyers transacted most of the industry's business and Jewish doctors ministered to the industry's sick. Above all, Jews produced the movies.<sup>12</sup>

Social scientist and media gadfly Ernest van den Haag adds further comments to how power is employed and how Jews in particular use it, in this case with respect to cinema's younger sibling, television:

The Jewish cultural establishment goes far beyond the strictly intellectual and academic milieu. It is spread throughout the communications industry and thereby enters almost every home in America. Hollywood

has always been a largely Jewish institution...On the other hand, the television industry was founded and staffed by a much later generation of Jews.<sup>13</sup>

What are the consequences that flow from this state of affairs?

MacDonald notes that "Jewish contributions to entertainment and the media have often had the function of promoting positive images of Judaism and multiculturalism and negative images of Christianity and European ethnic interests and identification."<sup>14</sup> Cursory as well as in-depth analysis verifies this claim. Take, for instance, the Pearls' conclusion to their exhaustive investigation of Jewish images on television, *The Chosen Image: Television's Portrayal of Jewish Themes and Characters*:

Since the inception of network television half a century ago, hundreds of popular TV shows have portrayed Jewish themes. Such topics as anti-Semitism, intermarriage, Jewish lore and traditions, Israel, the Holocaust, and questions of Jewish identity have been featured in a wide range of television genres...What is the television image of Jews and Judaism that emerges from this fascinating wealth of programming? In nearly every instance, the Jewish issues have been portrayed with respect, relative depth, affection, and good intentions, and the Jewish characters who appear in these shows have, without any doubt, been Jewish—often depicted as deeply involved in their Judaism.<sup>15</sup>

One interesting outcome of the Jewish-controlled portrayal of religion has been "the unraveling of the TV-melded Christmas-Chanukah holiday" into one where Chanukah can stand on its own merits. In an episode of *Frank's Place*, for example, when a non-Jew is invited to a Chanukah dinner at the home of lawyer Bubba Weisberger, the audience is treated to a lengthy and positive account of the holiday, one "without any thought of Christmas." On an episode of the 1992 *WIOU*, "Chanukah held center stage. The defacing of a Chanukah menorah in a public park by anti-Semitic thugs became the occasion for series regular Willis Teitlebaum" to explore his feelings and Jewish identity. This linkage of Chanukah with anti-Semitism was also the theme of an episode of *Sisters*, when vandals attacked a Jewish restaurant.<sup>16</sup> Here, then, is the privileging of a minor holiday of a small but powerful minority, while at the same time the Jew-as-victim message is reinforced.

The themes of anti-Semitism and Jewish victimhood have been and continue to be openly or subtly woven into story lines across the board, but the most urgent reminders of Jewish victimhood have come in the form of scores of highly graphic televised Holocaust specials, beginning with NBC's 1978 airing of the four-part miniseries *Holocaust*, which was seen by up to one hundred million Americans. In addition, notes historian Peter Novick,

the Anti-Defamation League distributed ten million copies of its sixteen-page tabloid, *The Record*, to promote the drama. Jewish organizations successfully lobbied major newspapers to serialize Gerald Green's novelization of his television play, or to publish special inserts on the



Holocaust. (*The Chicago Sun-Times* distributed hundreds of thousands of copies of its insert to local schools.) The American Jewish Committee, in cooperation with NBC, distributed millions of copies of a study guide for viewers; teachers' magazines carried other curricular material tied to the program. Jewish organizations worked with the National Council of Churches to prepare other promotional and educational materials, and organized advance viewings for religious leaders. The day the series began was designated "Holocaust Sunday"; various activities were scheduled in cities across the country; the National Conference of Christians and Jews distributed yellow stars to be worn on that day.<sup>17</sup>

Television viewers have likely also noticed the commercial-free Ford Motor Company-sponsored airing on NBC of Spielberg's *Schindler's List*. It seems unlikely that a major American corporation will soon sponsor a commercial-free viewing of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, especially now that Gibson has been involved in what some are calling an anti-Semitic affair.<sup>18</sup>

### III. HOSTILITY TOWARD GENTILES

If the average American were asked if a culture war was currently being waged in America, the significant number likely to answer in the affirmative would point to the ongoing liberal-conservative split, or, as it is now more commonly known, the battle between the blue states and red states. Were one to posit that Jews were waging an equally vitriolic (and not totally unrelated) war on majority Americans, there would likely be strenuous denials. In fact, however, leading intellectuals have described such a war — or *kulturkampf* — in minute detail.

John Murray Cuddihy argued in his 1974 book, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Levi-Strauss, and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity*, that, at least since the Enlightenment, a significant segment of Jewry has considered itself to be at war with the Gentile world and has acted accordingly. He wrote, "the ordeal in question involves the pain felt by newly emancipated Eastern Jews who began to realize that the Christian societies of Western Europe had overtaken them culturally, financially, artistically, and intellectually." According to Cuddihy, the Jewish response to this trauma has been anger and "vindictive objectivity"; worse, "they continue unabated into our own time because Jewish Emancipation continues into our own time."<sup>19</sup>

Just as Cuddihy shows how the Jews of the title have prosecuted their war on Gentiles in terms of psychoanalysis, class struggle and structuralism, he also shows how it is being waged more recently, for example in American fiction of late 1950s and 1960s. He could probably have found endless examples in the decades of televised cultural messages as well.

Historian Albert Lindemann prefers an allegorical approach to this *kulturkampf*, beginning with one of the founding myths of the Jewish people, the story of the feuding brothers Esau and Jacob (Gen. 25, 23–26). Lindemann argues

that this Jewish-derived division between Jew and Gentile has relevance from ancient times to our own day, including a Jewish tendency (even “instinct,” in Lindemann’s words) “to view surrounding Gentile society as pervasively flawed, polluted, or sick.” In modern times this tendency is to be found in ideologies such as “socialism (both Marxist and anarchist), Zionism, and various forms of the psychiatric worldview (Freudian psychoanalysis and related schools).”<sup>20</sup> Remarkably, Lindemann makes these arguments with no indication that Cuddihy’s work has informed him, suggesting a fortuitous simultaneous discovery on the order of the simultaneous but independent invention of calculus by Newton and Leibniz in the late 1600s.

Writing twenty-four years after Cuddihy and only a year after Lindemann, MacDonald makes a more straightforward case for a Jewish war on Gentiles. Applying a social identity approach, MacDonald illuminates Jews’ “very deep antipathy to the entire gentile-dominated social order, which is viewed as anti-Semitic.” MacDonald goes further than David Hollinger’s claim that the increased Jewish presence in academia (and elsewhere) has resulted merely in a generic “cosmopolitanism,” noting, “This antipathy toward gentile-dominated society was often accompanied by a powerful desire to avenge the evils of the old social order.” Referring to the many Jewish families “which around the breakfast table, day after day, in Scarsdale, Newton, Great Neck, and Beverly Hills have discussed what an awful, corrupt, immoral, undemocratic, racist society the United States is,” MacDonald argues that there were clearly elements of active hostility toward Middle American culture in general.<sup>21</sup> If so, it should be easy to find such hostility in modern TV fare.

### *Hostility toward Religion*

It is only natural that a group should find the symbols cherished by its perceived opponents threatening or irritating, which is a likely reason for the perennial Jewish attacks on Christian symbols in the United States. Norman Podhoretz admits that such heavily Jewish groups as the American Jewish Congress and the American Civil Liberties Union often oppose Christian beliefs in America, ridiculing these beliefs and attempting to undermine their public position.<sup>22</sup>

This observation is consistent with the findings of Hollywood film critic Michael Medved, who has written and spoken about the fact that so much of what emanates from Hollywood has become shockingly anti-religious, particularly with respect to Christianity. While Medved does not state it explicitly, we are witnessing the effects of a kind of cultural hegemony being exercised by a distinct group of Hollywood writers, producers, et al. who, as we have seen, are predominately Jewish. Medved writes:

In the ongoing war on traditional values, the assault on organized faith represents the front to which the entertainment industry has most clearly committed itself. On no other issue do the perspectives of the show



business elites and those of the public at large differ more dramatically. Time and again, the producers have gone out of their way to affront the religious sensibilities of ordinary Americans.<sup>23</sup>

Citing a 1992 study which found that "89 percent of Americans claim affiliations with an organized faith," Medved describes in detail how Hollywood has produced fare that is hostile to its audience's beliefs. He notes that many made-for-television movies are consistently grim regarding Christian identification. For instance, in the miniseries *The Thorn Birds*, handsome Richard Chamberlain plays a tormented priest who has broken his vows of celibacy. William Shatner, in his role as *T.J. Hooker*, tracks down a "ruthless, Scripture-spouting crook who leaves Bibles as calling cards at the scene of his crimes." ABC's *The Women of Brewster Place* shows a preacher luring a woman to his bed, while in one episode of *Unsub* "Bishop Grace" murders two teenage girls in his congregation. NBC's *In the Heat of the Night* aired an episode in which "Reverend Haskell" expires just after enjoying an affair with one of his parishioners. Two "Bible thumpin' hayseeds" appear as kidnappers on *Shannon's Deal*, paired up with "a devout Christian who murders his wife and then justifies the killing as 'an act of God...unstoppable as a flood.'" <sup>24</sup>

Christianity has fared just as poorly on animated TV shows. Fox Television Network's *The Simpsons* featured a scene in which the family gathered around the table to say grace, and Bart solemnly intones, "Dear God, we paid for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing." A more aggressive expression of disrespect was written into the Christmas episode from *South Park* entitled "Mr. Hankey, the Christmas Poo." A parody of the 1965 television special *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, this episode featured human feces as the spirit of Christmas, the obvious message being that "Christmas is shit." What we can see being played out in the visual media, then, is one aspect of the Jewish-Gentile kulturkampf in modern America.

Hollywood insider Benjamin Stein confirms this impression. In the 1976 essay "Whatever happened to small-town America?," he explores television's consistent hostility toward rural (read majority Christian) Americans. Stein begins by noting that "a truly great number of the people who write movies and television shows are Jewish," and given their largely urban upbringing, when they create TV fare they are not telling it "like it is."

Instead they are giving us the point of view of a small and extremely powerful section of the American intellectual community — those who write for the mass visual media...What is happening, as a consequence, is something unusual and remarkable. A national culture is making war upon a way of life that is still powerfully attractive and widely practiced in the same country...Feelings of affection for small towns run deep in America, and small-town life is treasured by millions of people. But in the mass culture of the country, a hatred for the small town is spewed out on television screens and movie screens every day...Television and the movies are America's folk culture, and they have nothing but

contempt for the way of life of a very large part of the folk...People are told that their culture is, at its root, sick, violent, and depraved, and this message gives them little confidence in the future of that culture. It also leads them to feel ashamed of their country and to believe that if their society is in decline, it deserves to be.<sup>25</sup>

#### IV. DENIAL AND DECEPTION REGARDING JEWISH POWER

As we saw earlier, any number of Jewish observers are willing to acknowledge the immense power of Jews in American media, particularly in Hollywood film and television, although this view cannot yet be described as conventional wisdom as far as the general public is concerned. But for informed observers, identity always matters. In *Jews and the Left*, Arthur Liebman observes that “one of the most important pieces of information a researcher can gather on a social movement is the socioeconomic composition of its membership.”<sup>26</sup> The same can be said about the ethnic composition of those openly commenting on Jewish power in the media: They are overwhelmingly Jews themselves. In contrast, Gentiles are routinely discouraged from noticing, yet alone analyzing, this phenomenon which is crucial in a democracy. As MacDonald notes, “Jewish groups have made any critical discussion of Jewish issues off limits, and that’s vitally important because, yes, Jews are a very powerful group.”<sup>27</sup>

It appears that a regime of silence has been imposed, with ample rewards going to those Gentiles willing to toe the party line and a graduated range of punishments being administered to those unwilling to abide by the established rules of discourse. Prominent examples have been cited by MacDonald et al., including the case of young British journalist William Cash. He is the one who, with innocent candor, noted the Hollywood presence of Michael Ovitz, Steven Spielberg, David Geffen, Jeffrey Katzenberg, Lew Wasserman, Sidney Sheinberg, Barry Diller, Gerald Levin, Herbert Allen, and others and wrote of the Spielberg-Geffen-Katzenberg “Dream Team:”

But in one respect at least this particular combination of talents, or “talent combo” in the local argot, will start out on the right foot. Like the old mogul founders of the early studios — and unlike most other failed build-your-own studio merchants — they are Jewish.<sup>28</sup>

This gaffe broke a cardinal rule, as articulated by columnist Joe Sobran: “Jewish control of the major media in the media age makes the enforced silence both paradoxical and paralyzing. Survival in public life requires that you know all about it, but never refer to it.”<sup>29</sup> Vincent Brook, author of *Something Ain’t Kosher Here*, belongs to the camp that would enforce this silence among Gentiles, applauding the fact that a group critical of some TV portrayals “refrained from reviving the old canard of Jewish media control.” Brook then elides attribution to a quote on the Cash affair, putting these words in Cash’s mouth: “[A] self-perpetuating Jewish cabal had created an exclusive Power

Elite in Hollywood."<sup>30</sup> Never mind that Brook's book is all about Jewish prominence in Hollywood.

Brook follows this censure of Cash with a condemnation of Marlon Brando for his unsettling statements on *Larry King Live*, claiming that Jews run Hollywood and exploit stereotypes of minorities. "Hollywood is run by Jews, it is owned by Jews," he began, "but we never saw the kike because they know perfectly well that's where you draw the wagons around."<sup>31</sup> Two comments about Brando's observation are in order. First, Brando could easily have added majority Christians to the list of exploited Hollywood stereotypes, as we saw above, but perhaps his greatest insight was about the "kike." Though an unfortunate choice of words, it does point to the fact that we do not begin to see in Hollywood fare even a fraction of the real doings of real Jews.

Leaving aside the touchy issue of modern Israel, we can still focus on two crucial aspects of Jewish American behavior that are essentially absent from TV discourse: the numerous wrongdoings of individual Jews and Jewish groups,<sup>32</sup> and the pervasive power of Jews in media, finance, politics, education, and a host of other important areas. Try to find a show that features the illegal activities of an Ivan Boesky or Michael Milken or dozens of other American Jews discussed in books like Connie Bruck's 1988 *Predators' Ball* or James B. Stewart's 1991 *Den of Thieves*.<sup>33</sup>

For detailed accounts of massive Jewish power in modern America, see what J. J. Goldberg, current editor of *The Jewish Forward*, wrote in his 1996 book *Jewish Power*, or political scientist Benjamin Ginsberg in his 1993 *The Fatal Embrace: Jews and the State*. Alone, these two instances of Jewish privilege in acknowledging and describing Jewish power amply demonstrate the rule about selective silence on the topic, but the greater point is that the American TV viewer does not see *any* representations on television of this vast power, unless one is willing to acknowledge the pervasive presence of Jewish reporters (Wolfe Blitzer, Barbara Walters, Mike Wallace, Ted Koppel, et al.), talk show hosts (Larry King, Jon Stewart, et al.), actors, comedians, spokespersons, et al. as an indirect display of Jewish prominence and power. Where, however, is the *direct* portrayal of this power? Miles Silverberg on *Murphy Brown*? If so, this kind of mocking of the belief in Jewish power in the newsroom serves to trivialize the debate, if not eliminate it completely. The absence of any narrative of Jewish power—political, financial, academic—forces us to reconsider the concept of "surplus visibility" and its application to American television.

## V. HOW HIDING THEIR POWER HELPS THE JEWS

In *The Jews of Prime-Time*, Zurawik describes the sociological concept of "surplus visibility": "the feeling among minority members and others that whatever members of that group say or do, it is too much and, moreover, they are being too conspicuous about it." He accepts the conventional wisdom

that membership in a “particular community of production” will result in less stereotypical images of that community and images “more representative of social reality.” The paradox he finds is that this “is not what happened with Jews and television.”<sup>34</sup> The Jewish “self-censorship” exhibited by important gatekeepers of TV programming such as William Paley, David Sarnoff, and Brandon Tartikoff can best be described as a form of deception in which Jewish producers of culture are highly conscious of the perceived interests of the Jewish community, and in which the question “Is it good for the Jews?” is often uppermost in their thoughts.

Almost without exception, a refusal to note the sheer unreality of Jewish images in popular culture is found. For example, film critic Lester Friedman makes the same error:

Unlike films about other American minorities, movies with Jews were often scrutinized by one segment of that minority group with the power to decide how the entire group would be presented to society as a whole. The resulting images of Jews in films constitute a rich and varied tapestry woven by several generations of moviemakers responding to the world around them.

This is fair enough as far as it goes, but he loses sight of reality when he continues, “Their works dynamically depict both the Jews’ profound impact on American society and that society’s perception of the Jews within its midst...But whether they explain or exploit their Jewish characters, *all these films either implicitly or explicitly show how Jews affect American life...* [emphasis added].”<sup>35</sup>

This is precisely where he gets it wrong, for these films, and the voluminous oeuvre of TV shows, *hide* the reality of how Jews affect American life. Where have we seen explicit representations of how Jewish activists have marched through the institutions of psychoanalysis, anthropology, or the Old and New Left? Where the Jewish role in Communism and its attendant infamies? Where the dramas featuring Jews agitating for open borders and other “immigration reform”? Most pointedly, where are the new shows starring Jewish neoconservatives in their quest for perpetual war in the Middle East?

As a reality counterbalance along the lines of the popular 24 series, in which indefatigable federal agent Jack Bauer (Keifer Sutherland) fights around the clock to protect the nation from terrorists, where is the series starring Ron Silver as Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff, and Jewish actors as his Israeli-born mother and rabbi father? Richard Dreyfus could play veteran Jewish activist Gregg Rickman, who was recently sworn in as the State Department’s Special Envoy for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism. If pugnacious Ed Asner was unavailable to play the recurring role of Abraham Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League, perhaps Harvey Keitel could do the honors. What is the likelihood of seeing anything remotely similar in the new TV season?

## VI. JAMES JAEGER ON *CRASH*

This deception is no doubt what so aggravated film critic James Jaeger, prompting him to excoriate Paul Haggis for his racial and ethnic depictions in *Crash*, the 2005 Oscar winner for Best Picture. Echoing Brando, Jaeger notes the film's ensemble of a diverse array of characters "crashing" into each other in a racially tense Los Angeles, but charges that "Nowhere is it shown that Jews also CRASH into Blacks, Whites, Latinos, Iranians, Asians, and Persians and profoundly affect THEIR lives — especially in Hollywood where CRASH is set and Jews comprise a dominating minority in the Los Angeles area." Rather, Jaeger sees the same old display of select diversity on-screen but no mention of the lack of diversity behind-the-scenes. "Why doesn't Paul write a feature that is set in the executive suites of say Warner Bros. or Paramount where the dominating minority is properly and accurately acknowledged as Jewish?"

One of the consequences of this unbalanced ethnic representation in the executive suite is a plethora of images attacking the values of the American Majority. The films that are financed or distributed by the dominating minority comprising liberal Jewish males "continue to emphasize the homosexual-lesbian agenda, Zionism, uncritical support for Israel, and endless Holocaust movies to perpetuate the myth of Jewish victimology." Further, "stories that bash and invalidate the nuclear family unit or stay-at-home mothers thrive. Stories that divide or poke fun at the Christian community, invalidate its history or attempt to dilute and eradicate its holidays, beliefs and/or values are financed and released by Hollywood insiders with abandon."<sup>36</sup>

I would argue that Jaeger's description of Hollywood's film agenda differs not a whit from its TV agenda, which is to "make movies that tell the stories that an elite group of insiders agree with and want told to the exclusion of almost all other stories and themes."<sup>37</sup> Clearly, this agenda produces winners and losers.

## VII. THE PROPAGANDA POWER OF TV

Political scientist Michael Parenti has investigated how media power is wielded. In *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media*, he writes:

The existence of a common pool of culturally determined (systemic, nonconspiratorial) political values cannot be denied, but where did this common pool come from? Who or what determines the determining element in the culture itself? And can we reduce an entire culture...to a set of accumulated habituations and practices that simply build up over time? ...A closer look reveals that the unconsciously shared "established" view...is not shared by everyone and is not in fact all that established...In other words, it may be true that most media elites...share common views on these subjects, but much — and sometimes most — of the public does not. What we have then is an "established *establishment* view" which is



given the highest media visibility, usually to the exclusion of views held by large dissident sectors of the populace. The “dominant shared values and beliefs” that are supposedly the natural accretions and expressions of our common political culture, are not shared by all or most...although they surely are dominant in that they tend to preempt the field of opinion visibility...In sum, media owners — like other social groups — consciously pursue their self-interest and try to influence others in ways that are advantageous to themselves.<sup>38</sup>

It is given “the highest media visibility” by being shown repeatedly on television. Such repetition is necessary for conditioning an uncritical audience to the message at hand. Media experts note, “There is little reason to believe that a single film or even group of films significantly influences audiences’ views over the long haul.” If, however, a constant and unwavering message is broadcast repeatedly, “it is reasonable to believe that such presentations will affect audiences to a significant extent.”<sup>39</sup> Or, as Margaret Miles puts it, “No one film has iconic power, but the recurrence of similar images *across* films weaves those images into the fabric of the common life of American society...We get, at a subliminal and hence utterly effective level, not the narrative but the conventions of Hollywood film.”<sup>40</sup> If movies can achieve this, imagine the power of television, which most people, including children, spend incomparably more time watching than film.

By way of an elegy for the American Majority, I note the conclusion MacDonald drew in 1998 about the Gentile response to the sustained ideological attacks on its culture and value. He believes that avoiding open ethnic strife in America means that “at least some ethnic groups be unconcerned that they are losing in the competition. I regard this last possibility as unlikely in the long run.”<sup>41</sup> At least for the present, it appears that majority Americans are indeed all too unconcerned about losing the competition, perhaps because they are so busy watching television and, to play on a title from Neil Postman, “amusing themselves to death.”<sup>42</sup>

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## ENDNOTES

1. Ernest van den Haag, *The Jewish Mystique* (New York: Stein and Day, 1969), 129.
2. “Is Hollywood Too Jewish?,” *Moment* (Aug. 1996): 37.
3. “Seriously Spielberg,” in Lester D. Friedman and Brent Notbohm, eds., *Steven Spielberg* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 171.
4. Vincent Brook, *Something Ain’t Kosher Here: The Rise of the “Jewish” Sitcom* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 49. Incidentally, *The Beverly*



*Hillbillies*, *Green Acres*, and *Petticoat Junction* were all creations of Jewish Paul Henning. See Paul Buhle, *From the Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture* (New York: Verso 2004), 263 (n. 39).

5. Neal Gabler coined this phrase for *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988).

6. Jonathan Pearl and Judith Pearl, *The Chosen Image: Television's Portrayal of Jewish Themes and Characters* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1999), 229.

7. Pearl and Pearl, *The Chosen Image*, 5.

8. David Zurawik, *The Jews of Prime Time* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 2003), 2–6, 62–63. Paley's dominance in the industry was such that for many years Paley's CBS took in 85 percent of the total profits for all three major networks.

9. Alina Sivorinovsky, "Images of Modern Jews on Television," *Midstream* 41:9 (December 1, 1995): 39–40. It is interesting to note that the shiksa theme, as an internal, gendered Jewish narrative about the Jewish male's sexual conquest or attainment of the Gentile woman, appears as unproblematic, which is odd considering how sensitive interracial and interethnic sexual encounters have been in American history. Modern scholars tend to strongly condemn views of women as sexual objects. For example, one finds abundant accounts (and condemnations) of instances where white males portray and possess Asian women as sex objects. This theme is apparent from *Madame Butterfly* to scores of Hollywood films, and has been unpacked in works such as Mari Yoshihara's *Embracing the East: White Women and American Orientalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) and "re-education" documentaries like *Picturing Oriental Girls* and *Slaying the Dragon*, where the trope of a masculine, dominant West and feminine, submissive East is interrogated.

10. Stephen J. Whitfield, *American Space, Jewish Time: Essays in Modern Culture and Politics* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1996), 151.

11. Quoted in Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, 1.

12. Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own*, 1–2.

13. Van den Haag, *The Jewish Mystique*, 141–142.

14. See <http://www.csulb.edu/~kmacd/books-derbyshire.html#2nl>

15. Pearl and Pearl, *The Chosen Image*, 5.

16. Pearl and Pearl, *The Chosen Image*, 32–39.

17. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999), 210. Novick notes that Jewish agencies separately targeted Gentile and Jewish audiences, and in the case of the ADL, they appear to have engaged in deliberate deception, where the study guides for Jewish children emphasized Christian anti-Semitism and denigrated assimilated Jews.

18. In the early hours of July 28, 2006, Gibson was pulled over for possible drunken driving. Los Angeles County Sheriff's Deputy James Mee, who is Jewish, made the arrest, after which Gibson was quoted as blurting out "a barrage of anti-Semitic remarks about 'f—ing Jews,' including the claim that 'the Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world.'" Finally, Gibson asked the officer, "Are you a Jew?" (Gabriel Sanders, "Gibson's New Line: Forgive Me, Foxman, for I Have Sinned...", *The Jewish Daily Forward*, August 4, 2006).

19. John Murray Cuddihy, *The Ordeal of Civility: Freud, Marx, Levi-Strauss and the Jewish Struggle with Modernity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2nd ed., 1987 [1974]), 68.

20. Albert S. Lindemann, *Esau's Tears: Modern Anti-Semitism and the Rise of the Jews* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 13–15.
21. Kevin MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique: An Evolutionary Analysis of Jewish Involvement in Twentieth-Century Intellectual and Political Movements* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 85–86.
22. Podhoretz in *Commentary* (1995): 30, cited in MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, 148.
23. Michael Medved, *Hollywood vs. America: Popular Culture and the War on Traditional Values* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 50.
24. Medved, *Hollywood vs. America*, 80–81.
25. Benjamin Stein, "Whatever Happened to Small-town America?," *The Public Interest* (Summer 1976), 22–23. In a later book, *The View from Sunset Boulevard: America as Brought to You by the People Who Make Television* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), Stein shows how Norman Lear had an extremely negative view of (Gentile) rural America: "In TAT, Norman Lear's production company, two shows set in small towns have appeared within the last two years — 'Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman' and 'Fernwood 2Night.' In both shows, what Marx called 'the idiocy of rural life' comes across powerfully. The small Ohio town of Fernwood, not quite rural and not quite industrial, is full of bigots, Klansmen, quacks, hillbillies, and religious frauds" (72).
26. Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1979), ix–xi.
27. See <http://www.csulb.edu/~kmacd/books-derbyshire.html#2nl>.
28. William Cash, "Kings of the Deal," *The Spectator* (October 29, 1994): 14.
29. Joe Sobran, "The Buchanan Frenzy," *Sobran's* (March 1996), 3. Though Cash found defense in the form of his Jewish editor, Dominic Lawson, he nonetheless was the target of strident rebuke from the American side of the Atlantic.
30. Brook, *Something Ain't Kosher Here*, 171.
31. Marlon Brando, *Larry King Live*, Friday, April 5, 1996.
32. For example, in 2002, the Anti-Defamation League settled a lawsuit in which it was accused of spying on San Francisco-area activists. The ADL's chief intelligence-gatherer in the Bay Area, Roy Bullock, was linked to San Francisco police inspector Tom Gerard, who later pled no contest to a charge of illegally accessing government information. (Bob Egelko, "Jewish Defense Group Settles S.F. Spying Suit," *San Francisco Chronicle*, February 23, 2002). In another case, in 2001, a federal judge upheld most of a \$10 million defamation suit against the ADL for labeling a Denver-area couple as anti-Semites. (Marc Perelman, "Judge Slams ADL for Hurting Couple Tarrred as 'Anti-Semites,'" *The Forward*, April 13, 2001.) Two senior employees of another important Jewish group, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), were fired after being accused of passing classified U.S. information to the government of Israel. According to documents, the two employees are policy director Steve Rosen and senior analyst Keith Weissman. (Dan Eggen and Jerry Markon, "2 Senior AIPAC Employees Ousted," *Washington Post*, April 21, 2005, A8). In addition to AIPAC's problems with this scandal, a robust controversy has broken out over the level of clout held by the institution. John Mearsheimer, a West Point graduate and now distinguished professor of political science at the University of Chicago, and Stephen Walt, academic dean of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, are credited with arguing that "a small group of Israel's supporters inside and outside of

government have a disproportionate influence over American foreign policy toward the Middle East, and this works to the detriment of U.S. security." Their essay, "The Israel Lobby," was published in the *London Review of Books* and continues to generate intense discussion and controversy. (See Michael C. Desch, "Prophets in Their Own Land: How to Go from Respected Academic to Anti-Semite—in One Simple Step," *The American Conservative*, June 19, 2006).

33. Connie Bruck, *The Predators' Ball: The Inside Story of Drexel Burnham and the Rise of the Junk Bond Traders* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988) and James B. Stewart, *Den of Thieves* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991). When director Oliver Stone put this issue on the big screen in *Wall Street* (1987), he only tangentially touched on the Jewish identity of the corrupt trader, Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas). In the sauna scene, Gekko contrasts his own origins with those of the wealthy WASPs in New York, who are more interested in animals in the zoo than in real people.

34. Zurawik, *The Jews of Prime Time*, 6.

35. Lester D. Friedman, *The Jewish Image in American Film* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1987), 9.

36. Parallels with MacDonald's arguments in *The Culture of Critique* are manifest: "Institutions that promote group ties among gentiles (such as nationalism and traditional gentile religious associations) are actively opposed and subverted, while the structural integrity of Jewish separatism is maintained" (89).

37. James Jaeger, "Paul Haggis, Bigotry & CRASH,"

<http://www.mecfilms.com/universe/articles/crash.htm>, 4 March 2006

38. Michael Parenti, *Inventing Reality: The Politics of the Mass Media* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 241–242.

39. Stephen Powers, David J. Rothman, and Stanley Rothman, *Hollywood's America: Social and Political Themes in Motion Pictures* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996), 10, 287.

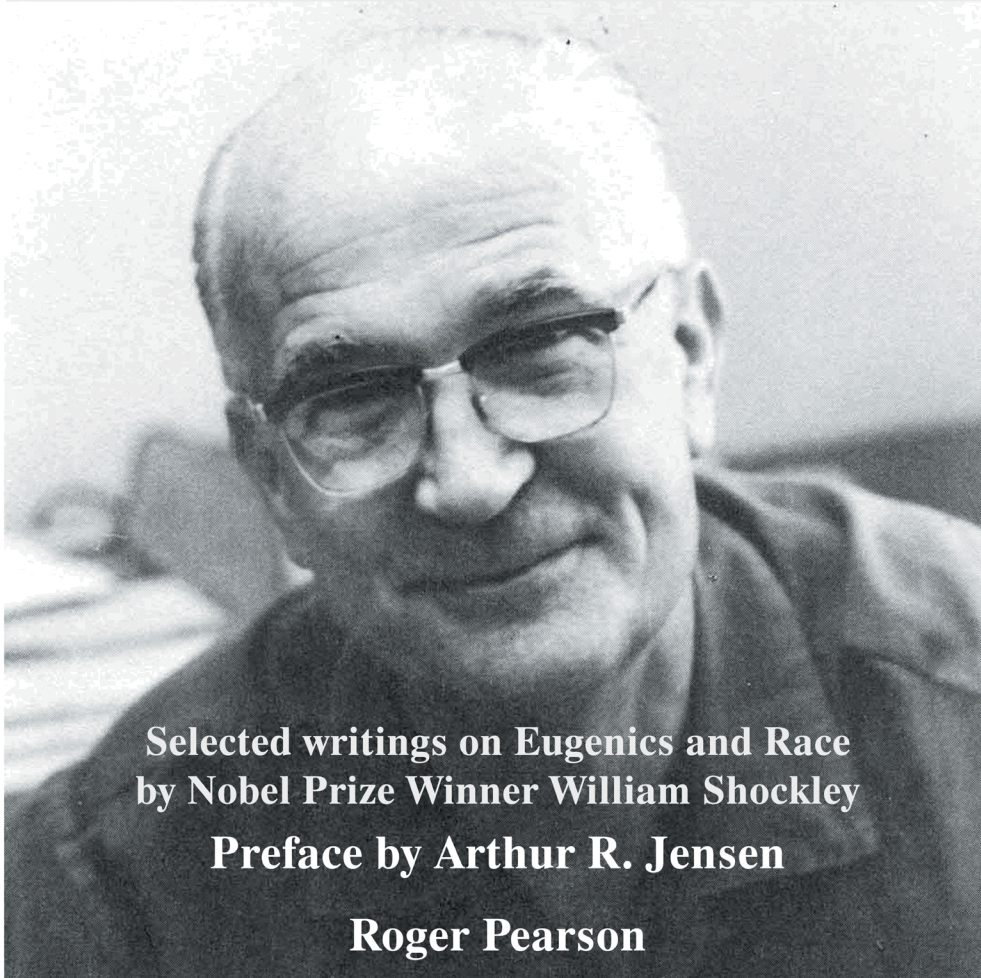
40. Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 190–191.

41. MacDonald, *The Culture of Critique*, 309.

42. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Adult, 1985).

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